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ABSTRACT

The Interagency Conference on Child and Family Statistics was organized around seven groups that were asked to develop specific recommendations for improving the federal statistical database on children and families. This booklet is a report on the recommendations made at the conference. The first part of the report distills and synthesizes the recommendations, representing a selective summary of those proposals that seemed to have broad support from conference participants. More specifically, topics addressed included (1) continued interagency coordination among the federal agencies, (2) modifications to existing data programs, (3) new data collection programs, and (4) maintaining basic statistical series on children and families. The second part of the report presents the complete set of recommendations made by each of the following seven issue groups: Health Status, Nutrition, and Use of Preventive Services in Infancy and Early Childhood; Family Income, Non-Cash Benefits, and Expenditures for Children; Family Structure, Parental Employment, and Child Care; Families, Schools, and Educational Outcomes; Health-Related Behaviors in Middle Childhood and Adolescence; Children as Victims and Offenders; and Special Populations of Children. (DST)

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IMPROVING NATIONAL STATISTICS ON CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

A REPORT ON RECOMMENDATIONS MADE AT THE INTERAGENCY CONFERENCE ON CHILD AND FAMILY STATISTICS

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IMPROVING NATIONAL STATISTICS ON CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

A Report on Recommendations made at the Interagency Conference on Child and Family Statistics

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The staff of Child Trends wishes to thank all of those who participated in the Interagency Conference on Child and Family Statistics that was held at the National Institutes of Health on April 12th and 13th, 1984. The names of conference participants are listed on pages 93-98 of this report. These are the people who generated the observations and suggestions that have been compiled and synthesized in this report. Those who took part in the issue groups that developed detailed recommendations in each of seven substantive areas are listed at the beginning of the appropriate sections in Part II of the report.

Special thanks are due to the moderator and rapporteur of each issue group and to those persons who took the trouble to provide comments on the first draft of the summary of recommendations. The final document is substantially improved as a result of these comments. Any remaining defects are the responsibility of the authors.

The following federal agency officials served as a planning committee for the Interagency Conference: Duane Alexander, James Gilmour Hill and Wendy Baldwin of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD); William Butz and Arthur Norton of the Bureau of the Census; Manning Feinleib and Mary Grace Kovar of the National Center for Health Statistics; and David Orr of the National Center for Education Statistics. George Gaines of NICHD provided practical assistance with the conference arrangements. Murray Aborn and Sarah Nerlove of the National Science Foundation and Barbara Kehrer of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation were the program officers from the supporting agencies. All of these people provided invaluable assistance and advice and their support is gratefully acknowledged.

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Part I. Summary of Recommendations Made at the Conference . . . 4

Themes and Priorities 5

Recommendations 8

A. A Continuing Coordination Effort 8

B. Modifications to Existing Data Programs 10

C. New Data Collection Programs 23

D. Maintaining Basic Statistical Series on Children and Families 37

Part II. Detailed Recommendations Made by Conference Issue Groups 41

Health Status, Nutrition, and Use of Preventive Services in Infancy and Early Childhood 42

Family Income, Non-Cash Benefits, and Expenditures for Children 47

Family Structure, Parental Employment and Child Care 59

Families, Schools, and Educational Outcomes 65

Health-Related Behaviors in Middle Childhood and Adolescence 69

Children as Victims and Offenders 73

Special Populations of Children 83

Participants in the Interagency Conference 93

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, a number of changes have occurred in public attitudes about marriage and the family, in the laws and customs that govern family life, in the variety of family forms, and in the operation and funding of public institutions and government programs that affect children. The rapid pace of change and the uncertainty as to what the changes may mean for children's development and well-being have prompted a widespread interest in reliable new information on the condition of children and youth. Although considerable data exist on the circumstances of children's lives and on changes in the health, academic achievement, and behavior of young people in the United States, much remains to be learned about how children's lives are changing, why change is occurring, and the implications of the changes.

Federal agencies are a primary source of statistical information on American children and their families. At present, the federal statistical system is a loosely organized set of data collection activities undertaken by a number of different agencies for a variety of purposes. Statistical agencies that collect data of special relevance for children and families include: The U.S. Bureau of the Census, the National Center for Health Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Human Nutrition Information Service of the Department of Agriculture. In addition, several program agencies support data collection through grants and contracts, such as the National Institute of Child

Health and Human Development; the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families; the Administration on Drug Abuse, Mental Health, and Alcoholism; and the Office of Child Support Enforcement. Because relatively little coordination between these agencies occurs, research on children and policy decisions that affect children's lives are often hampered by a lack of suitable information.

Child Trends, a private, non-profit organization, is working to improve the scope, quality, and usefulness of national statistics on children. With financial support from the National Science Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Child Trends organized an Interagency Conference on Child and Family Statistics. Meetings were held under the auspices of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development on April 12-13, 1984. Officials from various federal agencies, including those mentioned above, attended the conference, as did leading scholars from a number of relevant disciplines. The conference was organized around seven issue groups that were asked to develop specific recommendations for improving the federal statistical data base on children and families.

This document is a report on the recommendations made at the conference. The first part of the report is a distillation and synthesis of the recommendations. It is a selective summary that emphasizes those proposals that seemed to have broad support from conference participants. More attention is devoted to recommendations that focused specifically on child and family statistics and less attention is given to recommendations that

dealt with more general topics, such as the overall organization of the federal statistical system. The second part of the report presents the complete set of recommendations made by each of the seven issue groups.

PART I. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

THEMES AND PRIORITIES

Participants in the Interagency Conference on Child and Family Statistics were asked to make recommendations for improving the federal data base on children and families, but were not asked to come up with an overall ranking of the recommendations. It does seem possible, however, to make some statements about the general thrust of the suggestions made at the conference. These statements may help to give the reader some sense of the relative priority that should be attached to each of the recommendations presented below.

In general, what the participants seemed to be asking for was a coherent body of information about the population of children and youth in the United States and about the families that are raising these young people. This includes information about: the demographic characteristics of the child population; the life circumstances in which different groups of children are growing up; and the development, health, and behavior of the children themselves. All of this information should be available with the child and the family -- rather than the problem occurrence or the service-delivery episode -- as basic units of data collection and analysis.

As noted at the conference, statistics on children and families vary greatly in availability, quality, adequacy of population coverage, geographic scope and detail, and continuity and comparability over time. Of the three types of information mentioned above, the type that is most abundant in the federal data

base is demographic information; whereas the type that is least adequately represented is information about the development and behavior of different groups of children. Among the recommendations that should be given the highest priority, therefore, are those dealing with the need to broaden the scope of data collection about child development and well-being; to improve the accuracy and validity of data on children and families; and to insure the collection of such data on a regular basis.

With regard to information about the circumstances of children's lives, conference participants were pleased to observe that there had recently been a significant expansion in the collection of data about the economic status of families and their participation in government programs. The top priority here is to insure that these data are adequately analyzed and reported to the public in a regular and integrated fashion. On the other hand, it was noted that there is still a need for statistical data collection procedures to adapt to the changing realities of modern family life. These realities include the facts that family composition is not fixed or static, but often changes over time; family ties extend beyond household boundaries; many mothers work outside their homes; and many children live with only one parent or with one parent and a stepparent. These facts make it imperative to develop a set of background questions that adequately describe the family types and circumstances in which children live and periodically to include these background items in the major household survey programs of the federal statistical agencies.

Another major thrust of the conference was that it is very important for research and policy purposes to be able to link different types of information about children and families to one another. For example, for young people in a given demographic subgroup, it should be possible to simultaneously determine both the sorts of home or institutional environments in which they are being raised and the types of health, learning, or behavior problems that they are experiencing. This kind of data linkage is often difficult or impossible with the federal data base as currently constituted.

Two kinds of changes are needed in the various data systems of the federal government to facilitate linkage:

--First, to use more compatible collection, coding, and tabulation schemes, so that it is easier to collate information about a given birth cohort or demographic subgroup from the different programs;

--Second, to expand the range of information collected within individual data systems, so that it is more often possible to correlate different types of data at the level of the individual child and family.

Organization Of The Summary

In addition to reflecting the general themes and priorities outlined above, the specific recommendations presented in this summary have been organized into four categories, namely:

A) a call for a continuing coordination effort in the child and family area;

B) a set of recommendations that deal with modifications to existing statistical programs;

C) a set of recommendations that call for the initiation of new data collection efforts; and

D) a synthesis of several recommendations that reflect concern about the continued existence, adequate funding and staffing, or integrity of federal programs that now provide essential data about the nation's children and families.

The recommendations are accompanied by a brief description of the reasons why they were made and/or some of the considerations that might enter into their implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. A Continuing Coordination Effort

The ideas most frequently expressed at the meeting were that bringing together people from different agencies and disciplines serves useful purposes and that it would be good to have a continuing mechanism for interagency cooperation and for the exchange of information and suggestions about child and family statistics. These suggestions were the basis for the following recommendation.

A1. A coordinating body should be established to foster communication and cooperation among the federal agencies with respect to child and family statistics and to serve as a liaison between data users and data producers.

The proposed coordinating effort would have several objectives:

-- to promote complementarity of different federal surveys in terms of content and design;

-- to increase the standardization of measures and reporting categories; and

-- to design and encourage the production of more useful tabulations and analyses of child- and family-based data.

A number of the non-government participants expressed a desire for a central office and periodic reports through which data users could easily become familiar with ongoing data programs and recent developments. There was also a call for an expansion and periodic updating of the guide to federal data programs on children that was prepared for the conference.

Support was expressed both for interagency coordinating efforts within the federal government and for an organization or group that would serve a liaison function between private data users and federal data producers. It was felt that a body of the latter sort should be guided by knowledgeable individuals from the relevant federal agencies, from academia, and from the policy community. Such a group could work to make the statistical agencies more aware of and responsive to the needs of data users, while also working to make data users more aware of the constraints and opportunities in federal data collection programs.

One of the tasks that some felt a coordinating body could profitably tackle would be the preparation of a prototype statistical report on the well-being of children and families in the United States. Several issue groups at the conference emphasized the need to synthesize existing data on children and to insure that important forthcoming data, such as those from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, are fully analyzed and reported. One way of doing this is through the issuance of a regular report (or reports) on the status of children and families. Such a report might eventually be taken over by one of the federal agencies. However, the design of the report and the preparation of the first few issues might best be accomplished by an interdisciplinary and interagency group, perhaps working in conjunction with the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families and the Senate Caucuses on Children and on Families.

B. Modifications to Existing Data Programs

Many of the specific recommendations that were made at the conference were suggestions for changes in existing data programs, changes that would expand the scope or improve the quality or timeliness of the information produced by these programs. Although some of the suggested modifications would require the expenditure of significant amounts of money, others could be implemented at relatively little additional cost, or even at an eventual savings. Following are specific modifications that were recommended,

beginning with those that require only modest resources and proceeding through some that involve more extensive expansion or alteration of current agency practices.

B1. Statistical data concerning children should be tabulated using consistent and developmentally meaningful age categories.

The family circumstances of children, the types of problems that parents and children encounter, and the types of resources they need tend to vary substantially with the age of the child. Yet statistical data on children and families are often presented in ways that obscure rather than illuminate age trends. The age categories that are used in federal statistical publications are usually too wide (e.g., 5- and 10-year intervals) to do justice to the rapid pace of change in the childhood years. The ways in which the ages are grouped also make little sense from a developmental perspective. Age categories tend to vary from agency to agency and even from program to program within the same agency. This makes it difficult if not impossible to collate data from different programs in order to piece together a fuller picture of a particular age group -- or a particular birth cohort at successive stages of its development.

Statistical data on children would be more useful and instructive if they were presented in greater detail with respect to the child's age, using compatible and developmentally sensible age groupings. By using more detail, the needs of users with diverse perspectives are best served, as ages may then be

recombined in different ways to suit individual purposes. Some workable proposals for a standard set of age breaks have already been developed and tested. One of these proposals should be widely adopted by the statistical agencies. In addition, however, the agencies should, where feasible, make supplementary tabulations or machine-readable data files available that show child-based data by single years of age.

B2. A core set of background questions should be developed that fully describe the family types and circumstances of U.S. children. These items should be included periodically in the major household survey programs of the federal statistical agencies.

Standard questions and response categories should be used for basic items of background information, such as type of family, parent education and race and ethnic identification. A broader range of background data should be collected, such as information about family activities and participation in relevant government programs. There is a particular need for a classification of family structure that goes beyond the usual one-parent-versus-two-parents distinction and makes it possible to identify children who are living with step-, foster, or adoptive parents. Also needed are items dealing with financial support and/or child care provided by parents or other relatives who do not live in the same household as the child.

B3. Measures should be developed that reflect the timing and frequency of significant events in the child's life with regard to such areas as family composition, maternal employment, child care arrangements, school attendance, and program participation.

A number of conference participants expressed the belief that in order to gain an adequate understanding of variations in children's health, behavior, and development, it is necessary to have data on the timing and frequency of significant life events (such as having one's family disrupted or being shifted from one school to another), not just data on whether such events have ever occurred in the child's life. Data that are collected in the form of event histories -- i.e., in a form that shows what transitions occurred and when they took place -- allow for more flexible and powerful analyses of children's experience than do data that are collected by means of summary questions. Such data also make it easier to address the issue of cause and effect.

B4. Measures of children's health, learning, and behavior that are used in statistical surveys need to be improved. Sets of standard questions or test procedures that are psychometrically sound and may be used in large national studies should be developed and applied periodically in existing data programs.

What is needed to clarify many research and policy issues concerning children is information about how well children who grow up in different circumstances are functioning and developing. Yet,

as members of several issue groups noted, it is precisely this kind of information that is often missing from federal data programs. When they are included in federal surveys, measures of child health, learning, or behavior frequently lack demonstrated reliability and validity. Typically, the measures have not benefited from recent advances in measurement techniques and scaling methodology.

Because of the importance of having good statistics on how different groups of children develop and function, and because of the need to have comparable data over time, several issue groups recommended that steps be taken to standardize and improve the measurement of child health, learning, and behavior in federal surveys. It was recognized that it is not a simple matter to come up with valid and reliable procedures for assessing children's functioning and development in a survey context. The concepts and methods that are used in studies of adults are often inappropriate or at least less suitable for children. Yet the observational and testing techniques that are used in clinical settings and in laboratory research with children are apt to be difficult and expensive to apply in nationwide surveys.

Despite these difficulties, there is now a good deal of accumulated experience on the use of various interview, rating, testing, and self-report techniques in large-scale studies of children and youth. This experience should be used to derive standardized procedures for assessing child health, learning, and behavior in statistical surveys. In those areas in which agreement cannot be reached, or where the existing measures all seem to be

inadequate, federal agencies should sponsor methodological research aimed at developing better procedures for use in population surveys.

Several participants noted that the need for improved measurement techniques in some domains should not be used as an excuse for failing to collect any data at all in these areas. Instead the best measures currently available should be used in statistical surveys while work proceeds on the development of better measures.

B5. Statistical information about children should be obtained from the informant who is likely to know the most about the area in question. An accurate and rounded picture of the child's circumstances and characteristics will therefore often require multiple sources of information.

In a number of federal surveys, for example, the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, information about the children and family (or families) that reside in a given household is obtained by interviewing a single adult informant. This "household respondent" may be selected because he or she is the most convenient person to interview, rather than because he or she is the best informed about the matters in question. As a result, survey data files often contain a non-negligible proportion of missing data and/or data of dubious validity. The problem can be especially acute in the case of information about children because one member of the household -- the child's mother -- tends to be

far better informed about the child than are other members of the household. (This is so even in an era when fathers are supposedly playing a more active role in childrearing.) Information collected about such matters as a child's birth weight, immunization history, or grade placement in school will generally be more complete and accurate if the household respondent happens to be the child's mother than if the respondent is another household member.

However, even the child's mother is not necessarily the best informant in all matters concerning the child and the family. For example, the father may be a better respondent when it comes to questions about family income and household finances. The child's teacher will generally know more about the child's academic performance and need for special educational resources. The child's physician will usually be able to supply more precise diagnostic information about any recent medical conditions that the child may have suffered. And, at least with older children, the child himself or herself is probably the best source of information about attitudes, beliefs, and certain classes of behavior (especially deviant acts).

Conference participants recommended that federal data collection programs should seek to "go to the source"; i.e., to get a given type of information about a child or family from the informant who is likely to be most knowledgeable about the topic, even if it means adding to the cost of the program. If budgetary constraints make it necessary to rely on a single informant, that respondent should be the child's primary caregiver, who is

generally the mother. Whenever feasible, however, survey planners should think in terms of using multiple sources of information when gathering survey data about children.

B6. Statistical agencies should reexamine the common practice of using only adults or older teenagers as survey respondents. Age-appropriate interview methods that permit younger teenagers and even elementary schoolchildren to be used as respondents in their own right should be developed.

Some kinds of information about young people's experiences and behavior can best be obtained or can only be obtained from the young persons themselves. Two examples of federal survey programs where better information could be obtained if young people themselves were consulted are: the National Crime Survey, which now fails to collect any data on the victimization experiences of children below age 12 and obtains only proxy data on the victimization of 12- and 13-year-olds; and the National Health Interview Survey, which, when it collects data on smoking, drinking, and other health-related behaviors, does not obtain such information from teenagers.

On the other hand, conference participants acknowledged that there are legitimate concerns about the reliability and validity of survey responses from children, especially younger children, so that methodological work is needed to determine the best methods for obtaining valid responses from children at different developmental stages. For example, at younger ages, it may be best

to conduct parent-assisted interviews, whereas at older ages, children could be allowed to respond entirely on their own.

B7. Statistical agencies should make greater use of linking information from different data collection programs as a cost-effective way of expanding the scope and increasing the validity of their information about children and families.

Census and administrative record data are among the important types of data that may fruitfully be linked to survey and vital event files. For example, survey data files should regularly include information from the decennial census and other sources about the localities in which the survey interviews were conducted. Death-certificate data on infants who have died should be matched routinely to information from the birth certificates of the same children. Of course, record linkage programs should always include safeguards to insure the confidentiality of individual records.

B8. The statistical agencies should consider redesigning the sampling plans of their national surveys so that the surveys could provide more data on those groups in the population that are relatively small in size but of considerable research and policy interest, such as the handicapped, adopted children, or ethnic minorities.

A number of important groups in the population are only sparsely represented in the national probability samples used in

most statistical surveys. Among these groups are those with specific mental or physical handicaps; children living in step- or adoptive families, or other infrequent family types; Hispanics, native Americans, and other ethnic or racial minorities in addition to blacks; and families that participate in specific federal programs. Where appropriate and not already being done, survey samples should be modified to provide the capability of adding sufficient numbers of cases from these subpopulations so that more meaningful generalizations could be made about them. This can be done through probability sampling with oversampling of target groups, or by means of supplementary samples drawn from areas with high concentrations of particular minorities, from lists of program participants, or from other sampling frames. A combination of methods may be necessary to contain the costs inherent in oversampling rare populations. The supplementary cases would, of course, be weighted down to their proper proportion when overall national estimates were being prepared from the survey data.

B9. Data programs that involve surveys of families with children should include a longitudinal component in which some of the same families and children are reinterviewed several years after the original study.

Repeated assessments of the same families and children over a period of years can serve a number of useful functions. For example:

--They can make it possible to observe child development directly, rather than having to infer it from cross-sectional relationships with age.

--They can help to establish how much constancy or change there is over time in various child and family characteristics and what the prognostic significance of a given characteristic is.

--They can help to clarify what is cause and what effect in an observed correlation between two variables.

--They can make it possible to study dynamic relationships between the change (or lack of change) in one variable over time and the change (or lack of change) in another variable.

--They can improve the quality of the information collected in a survey through the use of shorter and more clearly bounded recall periods.

In addition to the general recommendation that the use of longitudinal follow-ups to existing statistical surveys should be expanded, there were several specific suggestions concerning the need for follow-ups to particular surveys. In the area of child health, for example, it was recommended that the infants in the National Natality Survey be followed for a longer period of time, such as to the point of school entry. It was suggested that the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, which has already conducted a follow-up study of examined adults, be expanded to include a follow-up of some or all of the children in the sample. It was also recommended that future editions of the National Health Interview Survey and its Child Health Supplement be designed with the possibility of longitudinal follow-up in mind.

B10. Federal agencies should take steps to produce child and family indicators on a more timely and predictable basis.

If statistical data on children and families are to be most useful for policy debates, the data must be made public while they are still fresh and pertinent to the issues of the day. Conference participants recognized that the timely production of high-quality statistics often requires more personnel and resources than the statistical agencies are granted. There are, however, some steps that could be taken to hasten the release of key indicators, steps that would not require massive investments of additional funds. These include the following:

a) Continue to develop and apply methods for automating the collection, coding, and analysis of routine statistical data.

b) Expand the use of the subsampling approach, whereby data on a representative subset of the study population are analyzed rapidly and released on a provisional basis. A good example of this procedure is the monthly reporting of provisional data on births and deaths in the Monthly Vital Statistics Report issued by the National Center for Health Statistics. Conference participants commended this effort and recommended that it be applied to other aspects of vital statistics and to other data programs.

c) Expand the use of standard statistical programming packages for the cleaning and analysis of new data sets.

d) Place as much emphasis on the production of data tapes that can be used readily by researchers outside of the government as on the preparation of routine descriptive reports.

Conference members also noted that the tracking of social trends and the planning of secondary research would be facilitated if researchers could have some assurance that statistical data on children and families would be collected on a regular and predictable basis. Participants asked that, where such plans do not already exist, the statistical and research agencies make a commitment to repeat major national surveys of children and families on a periodic schedule. In the health area, for example, it was recommended that the 1981 Child Health Supplement to the National Health Interview Survey be repeated every 5 years; and in the education area, it was suggested that the High School and Beyond Survey be replicated periodically with new cohorts.

B11. Federal agencies should cooperate with relevant state agencies to improve the local information systems from which a number of important child and family indicators are derived and to encourage more state-level survey programs comparable to those that exist at the national level.

Many of the policies and practices that concern families with children are determined at state and local levels. Yet the statistical indicators that are available to guide and inform state and local decision-making are often seriously flawed or grossly inadequate. Federal agencies should encourage the states to improve the quality and comparability of their vital registration systems and the record-keeping systems used in their schools, social welfare agencies, police departments, and family courts.

Specifically, ways should be developed for statisticans working at the national level to provide technical assistance to state and local projects. National clearinghouses should be established so that developments in one locale can be shared with others. The adoption of automated data collection systems by state agencies should be encouraged. Model procedures, formats, and safeguards for automated record-keeping systems should be developed at the federal level.

In addition to providing assistance to states that are willing to make an investment in upgrading their record-keeping systems, the federal government should encourage state agencies to conduct state-level or regional surveys comparable in content and design to those conducted by federal statistical agencies. Alternatively, the states could provide financial support for supplementary programs conducted by the federal statistical agencies, programs that would provide valid state-level estimates, either on a rotating basis or by aggregating survey data over a number of years.

C. New Data Collection Programs

National statistics on children and families can be improved significantly through modifications to existing programs such as those outlined above. In some areas, however, merely changing existing programs is not enough. New data collection efforts are needed to bridge gaps in the knowlege base, gaps that are impeding the progress of research and impairing our ability to make informed policy decisions.

Each of the seven issue groups at the Conference recommended that some specific new data collection effort be initiated to fill a blank area in the current statistical portrait of U.S. children and youth. (In one case, the recommendation was not that a new data collection program be started, but rather that the data being gathered by two recently initiated survey programs be adequately analyzed and reported.) These recommendations are presented in this section.

The conference participants recognized that current concern over federal deficits would seem to make this an inauspicious time to be launching ambitious new research programs. Nevertheless, the participants argued that these programs were necessary to monitor the effects of changes in those policies that affect children and families and to help determine how limited service resources could best be expended, as well as to foster basic research. In recognition of budgetary limitations, the conference participants suggested that any new data program should be cooperatively planned and jointly funded by several different federal agencies and should, if possible, involve non-federal funds as well. Each new data program should be designed as a resource for researchers from a number of different disciplinary backgrounds and for policy analysts representing a range of interests and perspectives.

Although each of the new data programs that was recommended has a different substantive focus, it does seem feasible to combine two or more of the proposed studies into one study. This would cost less than carrying out a number of distinct studies and would have the advantage of providing a more comprehensive perspective on the

development of the children under study, although the amount of information that could be collected in any one area would be reduced. In particular, it was suggested that a study of the academic achievement of children during the elementary years (see recommendation C4 below) could be combined with a study of the development of health-related behaviors in middle childhood and adolescence (see recommendation C5). The participant making this suggestion noted that it is important to determine how and to what extent school performance and educational factors interact with risk taking and health-related behaviors.

The possibility of combining two or more of the proposed new data programs is facilitated by the fact that several of the programs have design features in common. The common features include coverage of a range of topics in the same data collection effort; use of multiple sources of information about the child's circumstances and characteristics; and the inclusion of a longitudinal component in which the same children are followed over time, at least for a portion of their development.

The specific new programs that were recommended by the issue groups, and the rationales for their recommendations, are described briefly below.

C1. Steps should be taken to insure that two important new sources of data, the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the Consumer Expenditure Survey, are adequately mined to help illuminate trends in the economic well-being of families with

children. Federal statistical data on the economic status of children and families in the United States should be reported to the public in a regular and integrated fashion.

The members of the issue group on Family Income, Non-Cash Benefits, and Expenditures for Children did not propose a new data collection program per se. Rather, they noted that the quantity of statistical data on the economic status of children and families in the U.S. has recently expanded dramatically with the implementation of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and the fielding of the Consumer Expenditure Survey on a continuous basis. However, a good deal of work is required to fulfill the potential inherent in these survey files for illuminating the income and expenditure patterns of families with children. Further, as the group also observed, statistical information now collected by the federal government on the economic status of children and families is published in an uncoordinated fashion in a variety of reports, many of which are concerned primarily with other topics. This situation is particularly unfortunate given the fact that data on the economic well-being of families often assume a prominent role in debates over public policy. Thus, the group recommended that the federal government should undertake the regular publication of an integrated report on the economic well-being of children and families in America, a report that would make full use of the new data resources. The report should also incorporate data from other existing sources, such as those sections of the Current Population Survey that deal with family income, receipt of non-cash benefits,

and child support; the National Medical Care Utilization and Expenditure Survey; and the Quality Control Surveys, which monitor the characteristics of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, or Medicaid benefits.

C2. A broadly supported national survey of children should be mounted periodically to provide representative and up-to-date information on the different family situations in which U.S. children live, on parent-child relationships, and on the development, health, and behavior of children in various family types.

Numerous changes have taken place and are still taking place with respect to the living arrangements of children, childcare arrangements, the division of household and labor force responsibilities between women and men, the awarding of custody after divorce, the enforcement of child support obligations, and other aspects of family life and family law in the U.S. Although there is a great deal of public and professional interest in these matters, we are doing only a spotty and unsystematic job of tracking these social changes. Much remains to be learned as well about what these changes may imply for the development and well-being of American children. Because of considerations such as these, one of the new data programs proposed at the Interagency Conference was a survey that would focus on changing family forms, family relationships, and child rearing patterns in our society.

It would be desirable for the sample for this survey to be drawn so as to represent states that vary in family law, especially concerning such matters as grounds for divorce, child custody and support, foster care and adoption, and child care regulations. It would also be desirable to oversample some of the newer and more unusual family forms, so as to provide an adequate number of cases for meaningful generalizations about these arrangements. In addition, the survey should track at least some of the same families over time so as to furnish information about the stability of different family forms and the longer-term effects on children of various family situations.

C3. A coordinated effort should be undertaken to strengthen and expand the collection of data on health and nutrition in early childhood and to clarify the implications of early health and feeding patterns for later development.

Members of the issue group on Health Status, Nutrition, and Use of Preventive Services in Infancy and Early Childhood saw a need for a better statistical delineation of the health status of young children. The health of these children is not well defined by existing methods of measuring disability in terms of the limitation or restriction of "usual activity." The group called for more data on: the ages at which healthy and chronically ill children reach various developmental milestones; the functional capabilities of children with specific diseases; the mental health status and needs of young children; and the incidence and prevalence of, and use of

services for, the so-called "new morbidity" conditions that involve specific learning and behavior problems, such as dyslexia and hyperactivity.

Members of the issue group also noted that there was scientific interest in the prognostic significance of various developmental delays, behavioral symptoms, and illness patterns in early childhood; as well as policy interest in the longer-term consequences of participation in early intervention efforts, such as maternal and child feeding programs and health screening and treatment programs. Thus, not only is there a need for expanded data on health in early childhood, but also for longitudinal data on the links between early health and later functioning.

These data needs could be met by mounting new longitudinal studies. On the other hand, the needs could also be addressed by organizing a coordinated set of supplements and follow-ups to existing data programs of the Natinal Center for Health Statistics and the Department of Agriculture. Specifically, there are several existing surveys that include infants and young children in their samples: the National Natality Survey, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the National Health Interview Survey with its Child Health Supplement, which are all conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics; as well as the Nationwide Food Consumption Survey, which is conducted by the Human Nutrition Information Service. The content of one or more of these surveys with respect to early health could be expanded and the number of young children included in the sample could be enlarged. Moreover, the children could be tracked and revisited in middle childhood and

adolescence. The follow-up could be done as a component of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey or the National Health Interview Survey. This would make it possible to link information concerning prenatal care and the circumstances of birth, program participation, and early health and nutrition with data on physical health and growth, intellectual development, and social and emotional well-being later in childhood. Reports could also be obtained from parents and teachers concerning the need for and use of special medical and educational resources.

C4. A national longitudinal study of schoolchildren in the elementary grades should be initiated that focuses on educational issues and includes data on classrooms and schools as well as students. Information on children's attitudes and aspirations about school and on their education-related activities should be collected from the students themselves.

Conference participants noted that despite current concern over the quality of public education and the plethora of recent studies of the public schools, we still know relatively little about what goes on in elementary school classrooms across the United States and about how children's achievement and attitudes change as they progress through the elementary grades. Most of the recent studies of schools that have attracted public attention, including the longitudinal studies that the National Center for Education Statistics has conducted, have dealt primarily or exclusively with secondary schools. What is needed is a complementary program of research focusing on the elementary school years.

Although a few large-scale studies in the past have collected data on students in the primary grades, none of these studies was a full-blown longitudinal study in the sense that the NCES high school studies have been, and none has been replicated with more recent cohorts of elementary students. A number of recent smaller-scale studies have provided evidence that certain qualities of schools and teachers can make a difference as far as student achievement is concerned. The methods and measures used in these small-scale studies need to be incorporated into a national longitudinal survey so that the findings may be replicated (or refuted) with a large and properly representative sample.

Better data are also needed on what actually takes place in classrooms. Systematic observations made in a small number of elementary classrooms in the U.S., Japan, and China suggest that there are national differences in the amount of time spent each day in mathematics and science instruction and in the total amount of classroom time devoted to direct instruction. Such differences might help explain why U.S. students do not do as well as Asian students on international assessments of mathematical achievement. However, the information that we now have about time use in schools is based on small and non-representative samples.

Earlier surveys have made it clear that in order to obtain valid data about a child's educational experiences and performance in school, it is necessary to go to the school and teacher for information. However, in order to get valid and complete data about the child's family background, it is necessary to go to the

home and parents. Thus, a new longitudinal study of elementary students should gather data from both the schools and the homes of the participating students.

The issue group on Families, Schools, and Educational Outcomes suggested that the longitudinal study of elementary students should follow a cohort-sequential design, with new cohorts of students being added every three years.

C5. A national panel study should be launched that focuses on the development of a range of health-related behaviors and attitudes in children and adolescents. The behaviors that should be covered include: diet and eating habits; physical exercise and sports participation; drinking; smoking; licit and illicit drug use; unsafe driving practices and other forms of risk-taking; early sexual activity, contraceptive use, and pregnancy; and interpersonal violence and self-destructive behavior.

There are a number of habit patterns, such as patterns of eating, drinking, and drug use, that can significantly influence the subsequent health and longevity of the individual. Some detrimental behavior patterns begin in middle childhood or adolescence. Others do not appear until later in life but are shaped by childhood experiences. There has been a spate of scientific and legislative activity of late that has sought ways of preventing or reducing hazardous behaviors such as drug use or drunken driving among teenagers. These efforts would be aided by better statistics on the frequency with which various

health-related behaviors occur among young people of different ages and backgrounds. It would also be helpful to have representative data on what young people know and believe about these behaviors and their consequences. In addition, information is needed about how such behavior patterns develop over time, relate to one another, and relate to family, peer, school, and mass media influences, as well as to variations in state laws.

These sorts of data could and should be provided by a longitudinal survey that follows successive cohorts of young people from middle childhood through late adolescence and examines the development of health-related behaviors in an integrated fashion. To be sure, some important time series data on health-related behaviors have already been provided by studies such as Monitoring the Future, the National Survey of Drug Abuse, and the Zelnik and Kantner surveys of adolescent sexual activity. But these data tend to be limited to only a portion of the youth population (e.g., high school seniors in the case of Monitoring the Future), or to deal with only a narrow range of behaviors and attitudes. Conference participants felt that research and policy making in this area would benefit from a more comprehensive approach to statistical data collection and analysis.

C6. A periodic sample survey should be initiated that deals with young people who come in contact with the juvenile justice system either as offenders or as victims. The purpose of the survey would be to provide basic descriptive information about who

<u>becomes involved with the system; for what reasons; with what prior history; how they are treated once in the system; and with what consequences.</u>

There is a dearth of useful statistical information about children as victims of crime; about characteristics of juvenile offenders other than their age, sex, and race; and about the treatment of young people (whether victims or offenders) by police departments, juvenile or famiy courts, and corrections facilities around the country. In order to begin to remedy these deficiencies, the issue group on children as victims and offenders proposed that a survey of the "clients" of the juvenile justice system (broadly defined) be designed and implemented.

The survey should be a cooperative effort involving justice, social service, education, mental health, and other agencies with an interest in juvenile problems. It should cast a broad net so as to include a wide variety of problems and behaviors, and not simply those that are officially defined as crimes (e.g., dependency cases, abuse and neglect, status offenses, runaways, truancy and school discipline problems, juveniles remanded to mental health facilities, etc.). The survey should include a longitudinal component that would eventually provide information on juvenile criminal careers and on the longer-term consequences of various childhood experiences and of judicial and administrative decisions.

Obviously, the juvenile justice system is not a unitary entity, but varies from state to state and from locality to locality. The

proposed survey would be most useful if it could provide data about the operation of juvenile justice systems in different states or at least in different types of states.

C7. Mechanisms should be established to provide basic statistical data about children in institutions and other children with special needs who are not adequately represented in existing surveys.

A number of groups of children are of considerable research and policy interest but are excluded from statistical surveys because these surveys usually cover only the non-institutionalized population, or because the groups are very small in size and/or pose special measurement problems. The groups include: children who reside in institutions of various kinds; children who have been placed in foster care or "special needs" adoption; children with specific chronic illnesses or handicaps; and children from recently arrived immigrant groups whose members generally do not speak English. These children tend to receive a disproportionate share of federal and state resources because of their special health or educational needs. However, statistics about these groups are generally quite inadequate.

The issue group on Special Populations of Children made a number of recommendations for improving statistics in these areas, including the following:

-- Data on children in institutions should be collected on a recurring basis. It is important not only to have counts of how

many children and youth are institutionalized, but also to know something about the characteristics of these young people, such as: age, sex, ethnic background, and current functional status. Sample survey data should also be collected about the service needs of young people in institutions; the kinds of care they are receiving; and the cost of the care.

-- Survey data should be collected on the range of services used by members of special populations. These data should make it possible to relate service usage to demographic, functional, familial, and economic characteristics of the children, as well as to service availability and need.

-- Better information is needed on the families of children who fall into a special population category. Survey data should be collected on the costs and demands involved in raising special children, on the difficulties experienced by parents and siblings in these families, and on the benefits derived from family-oriented programs, such as family subsidies for maintaining severely handicapped children in their natural or adoptive homes.

-- More coverage of special populations is needed in studies that could provide data on the long-term costs, risks, and attainments associated with specific handicaps or early life histories, and with participation in specific social programs. In particular, longitudinal studies of educational achievement and occupational atainment in late adolescence and early adulthood should do a better job of representing individuals from these special groups.

The group on Special Populations noted that improving statistics in these areas does not necessarily require entirely new data programs. But it does mean that existing surveys, such as the National Health Interview Survey, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, would have to be expanded to include supplementary samples drawn from institutions or rosters of program participants. In some instances, new measuring instruments that are suitable for assessing the health and achievement of children in these special situations would have to be developed. In addition, some note would have to be made of the substantial variation from state to state in the determination of who is eligible for a given special program and in the level of resources made available to children and families that qualify for the program..

D. Maintaining Basic Statistical Series on Children and Families

A number of the comments made at the Interagency Conference reflected concern about the continued existence and integrity of federal programs that provide basic time series data about the nation's children and families. Most participants acknowledged that the continued operation of major statistical programs such as the Current Population Survey, the National Health Interview Survey, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, seems highly likely. However, it was noted that budgetary and staff cutbacks have already caused significant deterioration in the range

of data that are being collected under some of these programs or in the speed with which data are being analyzed, reported, and released to the public.

For example, the Census Bureau's annual reports covering topics such as the living arrangements of children, family income levels, and the receipt of non-cash benefits now appear after a substantially greater delay than they did a few years ago. The release of data from the 1981 Child Health Supplement to the National Health Interview Survey was delayed several years because of the lack of sufficient computer programming staff at the National Center for Health Statistics. Several subject areas in the National Assessment of Educational Progress are not scheduled to be repeated any time in the near future because current funding levels for the program in real dollars are now substantially less than they were in the program's earlier years. Conference participants also noted that there was uncertainty about the scheduling of future rounds of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the National Survey of Family Growth, and the Youth Panel of the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Force Behavior.

Apprehension was expressed at the conference about the possible politicization of federal statistics on families and children. Participants felt that it is perfectly appropriate for the federal statistical agencies to produce those data that are responsive to the policy concerns of the Executive Branch, the Congress, or the public. However, several participants emphasized that Congress and the Executive Branch should take great care to insure that political considerations do not compromise the integrity or

availability of federal statistics. Other participants noted that those outside of government who would cite statistics on children in order to criticize some policies or promote others are also under a similar burden of responsibility.

Another area of concern with respect to the maintenance of basic statistical series was that new data programs, such as the Survey of Income and Program Participation, that may eventually replace existing programs might not, in fact, produce data that are strictly comparable or equally useable as the older programs. Therefore, it was suggested that before any established data collection program is discontinued in favor of a new program, the agencies involved should allow for a period of overlap between the two programs. The overlap would make it possible to demonstrate the workability of the new program before the old program is abandoned. It would also permit the calibration of statistical time series that were begun under the old program and the continuation of the series under the new program.

In the final analysis, however, the central recommendation made with regard to the maintenance of child and family statistics, was a call for adequate and reliable funding of the basic statistical programs.

D1. <u>The federal statistical agencies should be given adequate funding and staff to insure the regular and predictable collection, and the timely reporting and release, of basic data on the well-being of children, youth and families in the United States.</u>

This recommendation is one on which many of the other recommendations are predicated. Adequate funding is necessary to sustain sample sizes, maintain data quality, repeat surveys at suitable intervals, and allow for timely production of descriptive reports and public use tapes. Conference participants noted that the continued availability of statistical time series that show how social and economic conditions are changing for families with children is especially important in an era when the federal role in providing social programs is being rethought. The maintenance of basic data series is essential if we are to learn from the changes that are taking place.

ISSUE GROUP ON
HEALTH STATUS, NUTRITION, AND USE OF
PREVENTIVE SERVICES IN INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

Panel Members	Federal Agency Resource Persons
Sam Shapiro, Moderator	Manning Feinleib
Deborah Walker, Rapporteur	James Gilmour Hill
Klaus Roghmann	Sharon Mickle
Barbara Starfield	Paul Placek
Eleanor Szanton	George Rhoads
	Susan Welsh
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1. Interagency coordination is a key element in having good data on children's health at all levels. When a survey is being developed, the timing of the survey, the items to be included, the standard coding formats used (e.g., age) and decisions about analyses and reporting should all involve collaboration between relevant agencies. For example, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey of the National Center for Health Statistics and the Food Consumption Survey of the Department of Agriculture could benefit greatly from such coordination.

2. The National Center for Health Statistics' monthly reporting of provisional data on births and deaths is a useful resource. The Center's plans to link birth and death records will increase the value of this resource. It is recommended that the Center expand its efforts to disseminate available vital statistics data in a timely fashion so that data are available on such items as race and ethnic group and birth weight more quickly than is now the case. The Center might provide these data earlier on a subsample basis if it can not be done on the total national sample.

3. Data sets may often be considerably enhanced through linkages with other data files. Expanded use of such linkages should be made. For example, the hospital discharge data, county codes, hospital information, and area resource files could usefully be

linked. Although it is necessary to overcome issues of confidentiality, such community linkages are now being added to the Natality Follow-Back data file.

4. More complete information about the geographic location of respondents (region, state, size and type of place, etc.) should be included in data files so that analyses by local area can be done more easily and quickly.

5. The 1981 Child Health Supplement to the National Health Interview Survey should be repeated every 5 years. Health status scales from the 1981 data and other available data sources should be included.

6. The group recommends more collection of data on developmental milestones, functional status, and "new morbidity" conditions, (i.e., behavior and learning problems, along with use and cost of services directed at these conditions). The 1981 Child Health Supplement and other data sources should be used to develop functional status measures.

7. More data on the mental health status and needs of young children are necessary and should be developed and regularly incorporated in the data programs of the National Center for Health Statistics.

8. More information on special populations of young children is needed and should be developed. Preschool children should be over-sampled on the National Health Interview Survey, as should disabled and chronically ill children.

9. The use of longitudinal surveys should be encouraged. Prototypes now exist that can be expanded or continued. For example, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey follow-on could be expanded to include children as well as adults, and the children studied in the followback National Natality Survey could be followed for a longer period of time. Future designs of the National Health Interview Survey that include longitudinal samples are to be encouraged. New data should be collected employing longitudinal formats. Examples include the possibility of following all children born on a particular day; studying overlapping cohorts born in different years, each for several years; or initiating long-term "cradle-to-grave" studies.

10. Efforts at the local and state level to collect and analyze vital statistics and other data should be encouraged. To assist these efforts, the group recommends that ways be developed for personnel working at the national level to provide technical assistance to local and state projects. It would be useful to establish a clearinghouse so that developments in one locale can be shared with others. The group also encourages the rapid adoption of automated data collection systems; the National Center's current plans in this regard are encouraging, and the Center should move toward having fully automated systems in place on a long-term basis.

11. Through cooperation with states, the Hospital Discharge Survey should be made available for follow-up studies, and for linkages to other data systems.

12. The Centers for Disease Control collect data on immunization among children under age 2. And the immunization status of children entering school is known and reported. Immunization data for children from age 2 until school age should be added to complete the immunization picture for young children.

13. The group encourages alternative sample designs which provide national estimates and estimates for geographic sub areas that could be linked to relevant community characteristics. Community characteristics relevant to the health of children include health care resources and environmental quality indicators.

14. Archives of data sources available to the public are a very important resource and are to be encouraged. The National Center for Health Statistics is an excellent model for other agencies in this regard. It is recommended that the agencies move to computerized systems so that it would be easy to retrieve information about data systems that contain variables of interest.

ISSUE GROUP ON

FAMILY INCOME, NON-CASH BENEFITS, AND

EXPENDITURES FOR CHILDREN

Panel Members	Federal Agency Resource Persons
Harold Watts, Moderator	Craig Hathaway
Donald Hernandez, Rapporteur	Jack McNeil
Peter Budetti	
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Paul Smith	

FAMILY INCOME, NON-CASH BENEFITS, AND EXPENDITURES FOR CHILDREN

The deliberations of the Issue Group on Family Income, Non-Cash Benefits, and Expenditures for Children led to five major recommendations pertaining to:

(1) the need for a report published regularly by the federal government on the economic status of children and families;

(2) the need to fully realize the potential value of the Quality Control Surveys;

(3) the need for a bipartisan commission appointed by the Congress to undertake a major review and reformulation of the official poverty income threshold employed by the federal government;

(4) the need for a more appropriate institutional framework for federal authority pertaining to the coordination and development of statistical standards; and

(5) the need for timely and easy accessibility to data from major statistical systems.

1. The first and most urgent recommendation is that the federal government undertake the regular publication of a report on the economic status of children and families in America. It is recommended that the report be legislatively mandated. The House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families and the Senate Caucuses on Children and on Families should be involved in the design

of the report and should encourage the appropriate legislative committees of Congress to take action to mandate the regular production of the report. It is also recommended, as a particularly desirable approach, that a prototype report be prepared under the auspices of a research organization with strong scientific credentials with funding from either the federal government or a private foundation. The prototype report should not be prepared by a policy-advocating organization or agency, because the nonpartisan integrity of the report must be beyond dispute. After the developmental stage, the regular production of the report should be institutionalized within the federal government.

This recommendation is based on two major observations. First, the large quantity of information now collected on the economic status of children and families is published in an uncoordinated fashion in a variety of reports, many of which are concerned mainly with other topics. Second, the quantity of pertinent data has recently expanded dramatically with the implementation of the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the fielding on a continuous basis of the Consumer Expenditure Survey.

Because the Survey of Income and Program Participation follows panels of respondents for 2-1/2 years to obtain detailed information every four months on current income and public program participation, it provides an unprecedented opportunity to ascertain the nature of income flows and program participation, both for relatively short periods of time and over extended periods of time, for individuals and families as they experience changes in household composition, income, and labor force participation. Because the Consumer

Expenditure Survey now includes 5,000 consumer units which provide interview and diary information on expenditures for a period of five quarters, it offers an unprecedented opportunity to ascertain the nature of, and changes in, expenditures made by consumer units for the children for whom they have immediate responsibility. Because of the recency of these new data collection efforts, the time is propitious for developing new and more useful approaches to presenting data on children and families.

Furthermore, it is urged that this report consist not simply of a compilation of relevant statistical data, but that the report emphasize the use of graphs, diagrams, or figures depicting the trends and distributional information, with backup tables containing statistical data provided for the interested reader in special appendices. Brief interpretive text, accompanying the graphical material, should discuss the importance of each measure, how the trends have been changing, and any specific properties of the data that are relevant to its interpretation. If alternative credible interpretations are available, however different, they also should be mentioned. A second section could contain articles dealing with current topics or the results of empirical studies of the status of children and families, and the factors that influence their well-being.

In addition to drawing upon data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the Consumer Expenditure Survey, the report should also rely upon results from the Quality Control Surveys (also see Recommendation 2), the National Medical Care Utilization and Expenditure Survey, and other relevant surveys. Both income and

expenditures should be treated in detail, with particular emphasis on the distribution of children and families according to income levels, participation in various public programs, consumer expenditure categories, and the duration of the time periods during which they remain in specific statuses.

2. The federal government should seek to fully realize the potential value of the Quality Control Surveys.

This recommendation is based on one major observation. The Quality Control Surveys provide the most detailed eligibility data that currently exist for participants in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program, the Food Stamps Program, and the Medicaid Program. The surveys rely upon information from neighbors, banks, and other institutions that obtain and retain information on individuals who participate in these three public programs. Furthermore, information is obtained every six months in each of the 50 states for a large sample of program participants. Consequently, these data are of considerable potential value as a means of increasing knowledge about the nature of public program participation in the U.S. Since information about the age of program participants is recorded, special emphasis could and should be accorded to tabulating and publishing information that characterizes the circumstances of children who participate in these programs.

The primary purpose of the survey is to ascertain the extent to which the program eligibility and payment decisions of the states are correct or in error. For example, the survey seeks to determine the extent to which the eligibility requirements are, in fact, met by

individuals who have been ruled by a state to be eligible for a particular program, and the extent to which overpayments or underpayments are made to program participants. But because of the potential relevance of these data to a much broader range of scientific and public policy issues, it is recommended both that detailed statistical reports using these data be regularly published by the federal government and that the data be made easily accessible on public use microdata computer tapes. The utilization of both approaches will encourage the full realization of the potential value of these data. It should also be noted, however, that the Quality Control Surveys are particularly invasive surveys, and consequently that adequate controls should be implemented to insure that the uses to which these data are put do not infringe upon the privacy or the civil liberties of the individuals included in the survey.

3. Congress should appoint a bipartisan commission to undertake a major review and, if warranted in the view of the commission, reformulation of the official poverty income threshold employed by the federal government. In order to insure that the recommendations of this commission rest upon value judgments that reflect the broad consensus of Americans, the commission should include representatives of major constituencies in American society. Furthermore, in order to insure that the commission's recommendations are founded upon the best possible technical information, the commission should convene a panel of experts to identify and address important technical issues and their implications.

This recommendation is based on two major observations. First, the Bureau of the Census has begun to publish data on the effect on poverty counts of including non-cash benefits in the definition of income. Serious questions have been raised concerning the appropriateness of using modified definitions of income in conjunction with official poverty thresholds which were developed on the basis of cash income only. The implementation of the Survey of Income and Program Participation brings new emphasis to the issue of valuing non-cash benefits. The issue of valuing non-cash income for the purpose of defining poverty status also has important implications for the ability of the Census Bureau to produce poverty data from the 1990 census (data on non-cash benefits were not collected in the 1980 census).

The implementation of the Survey of Income and Program Participation also raises the issue of the proper accounting period for defining poverty status. The accounting period for the Current Population Survey and the official poverty definition is one year, although this requires the simplifying assumption that the household composition did not change over the year. Because the Survey of Income and Program Participation will collect information from households every four months, the simplifying assumption of no compositional change is more realistic for this survey.

The second major consideration undergirding this recommendation is that a decision about what constitutes the "proper" threshold for the official poverty level must be founded upon judgments that are inherently value-laden, inherently normative, and hence inherently political. The threshold that defines whether or not the income of a

family is "adequate" or "inadequate" depends upon normative value judgments that will differ from society to society and from time to time within a given society, depending upon the economic, social, and political circumstances of the society at a particular point in time. Furthermore, the pluralistic nature of American society suggests that its many and diverse social and economic groups may vary considerably in their normative evaluations of what constitutes an adequate income, and hence of what constitutes poverty.

In this context, scientific information about the measurement of income, the sources of income, and the consequences of living at different income levels may be useful in setting the official poverty threshold. But in the final analysis the decision of which particular income level to use as the threshold is one that must rest upon a political consensus supported by the many groups that constitute American society. The authority to set the official poverty standard for the federal government currently resides with the Office of Management and Budget. But as an administrative office that necessarily reflects the views of whichever political party is in power, the Office of Management and Budget cannot be expected to adopt the bipartisan viewpoint required to select a poverty threshold founded upon a broad political consensus. Hence, it is recommended that the Congress appoint a bipartisan commission to undertake this task.

4. The fourth recommendation is that a more appropriate institutional framework be created for federal authority pertaining to the coordination and development of statistical standards.

This recommendation is based on two major observations similar to the ones cited in conjunction with Recommendations 1 and 3 above. First, with the dramatic increase in information associated with the implementation of the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the continuous fielding of the Consumer Expenditure Survey, new opportunities are emerging to improve the accuracy of income and expenditure estimates. For example, new information on program participation will make possible the allocation of Medicare and Medicaid expenditures to individual households. This raises technical questions about whether to assign dollar values to non-cash benefits, and if so what values to assign (e.g., the cost of the non-cash benefit to the federal government, including administrative overhead, or the amount which the recipient would have been willing to pay, or the value if purchased on the open market). It also raises questions about whether and how to include non-cash benefits provided to employees by employers (e.g., health insurance), and about whether and how to include private cash or non-cash transfers across households. Finally, since many such benefits and transfers, both public (federal, state, and local), and private (family and charity), existed prior to the collection of relevant statistical data, complex technical questions concerning historical consistency and comparability also arise.

Second, because of the many public and private uses of the statistical information that is generated and reported by the federal government, it is critical that the collection of information be coordinated across agencies, that standard definitions and procedures be employed whenever practical, and perhaps most importantly that the

scientific integrity of federal statistics be assured beyond doubt. The complex technical issues involved also suggest the need for continuous, high quality, technical input into activities directed toward the coordination and standardization of statistical activities.

The authority to coordinate and develop statistical standards currently rests with the Office of Management and Budget which, as noted in conjunction with the preceding recommendation, is inherently partisan. In addition, the many broad responsibilities of the Office of Management and Budget limit its ability to focus the sustained and detailed attention on the important but extremely technical issues that must be addressed if the quality of federal statistics is to be assured. Hence it is recommended that a more appropriate institutional framework be created for federal authority pertaining to the coordination and development of statistical standards. This framework should have both the ability to draw as needed for detailed technical advice upon the scientific community and the authority to implement decisions.

5. Timely and easy access to data from major statistical systems should be insured. Statistical systems that merit special attention include the Survey of Income and Program Participation, the Consumer Expenditure Survey, and the Quality Control Surveys.

This recommendation is based on the observation that as statistical information systems increase in size, number, and complexity, it is becoming impossible for the federal government to provide detailed tabulations to meet all of the needs of the numerous

and diverse users of statistical data, and it is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive for users to obtain timely access to these data. The ever-expanding use of statistical data by governments in the development of public policies, by the private sector in the provision of goods and services, and by scholars in the advance of scientific knowledge underscore the importance of timely and easy accessibility to needed data.

As in several of the preceding recommendations, the implementation of the Survey of Income and Program Participation offers new possibilities while raising new problems. Because it collects detailed information every four months from panels of respondents who are followed for a total of 2-1/2 years, and because the design calls for panels which overlap in time, the resulting data will be extremely complex and difficult to analyze. These difficulties combined with the potentially great value of the data from this survey suggest that these computer data tapes will require more processing than the usual Public Use Microdata Samples produced for other major data bases. Serious consideration should be given to the creation and dissemination of a series of "Sub" Public Use Microdata Samples designed for easy use and tailored to the special needs of relatively large and well-defined user communities.

The implementation on a continuous basis of the Consumer Expenditure Survey, and the concommitant increase in both the complexity and the usefulness of the resulting data also suggest that special attention should be paid to insuring the timely and easy

accessibility of these data. In addition, as urged in Recommendation 2, the great potential value of the Quality Control Surveys will be realized only if these data are made available through easily accessible public use microdata computer tapes.

Finally, it is recommended that, within the limitations set by confidentiality regulations designed to protect the privacy of individuals, increasing use be made of emerging microcomputer and telecommunications capabilities, in order to facilitate the timely and easy accessibility of data from these and other major federal statistical systems.

ISSUE GROUP ON

FAMILY STRUCTURE,

PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT AND CHILD CARE

Panel Members	Federal Agency Resource Persons
Frank Furstenberg, Moderator	Wendy Baldwin
James Peterson, Rapporteur	Harvey Monder
Larry Bumpass	Arthur Norton
Ellen Greenberger	Martin O'Connell
Robert Hill	William Prosser
Frank Mott	Elizabeth Waldman

1. Research on the family and the effects of family structure, parental employment, and child care would benefit from greater cross-fertilization between researchers in the fields of child development and social demography. Child development psychologists need to become more familiar with the availability of large-scale and nationally representative samples, and with techniques for analyzing such data. Social demographers need to become more aware of the theories of child development and related research findings. This might be accomplished through research traineeships.

2. There is a need for better coordination of, and communication about, the various statistical data programs of the federal government that produce statistics on children. To facilitate this, a coordinating body should be established with the following functions:

a) to promote communication and coordination among the relevant government agencies so as to increase the standardization of measures and the complementarity of different surveys in terms of content, design, and use.

b) to serve as a liaison between data users (researchers and policy makers) and data producers so that data users may have a central office through which they could become familiar in an efficient manner with available data programs and recent developments and so data producers may become more aware of the needs and concerns of data users.

3. Different data sets containing similar information should be jointly analyzed to compare findings and triangulate in the measurement of family structure, parental employment, and childcare. For example, estimates of fertility behavior from the Current Population Survey and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth have been shown to be quite similar. A comparable analysis of these same two data sets on the topic of child care could be undertaken. Many other similar possibilities exist.

4. The content and format of public use tapes should be designed to provide users with the greatest possible flexibility in combining data in ways most suited to their needs. While the addition of summary measures and constructed variables is often useful and efficient, the inclusion of such variables should not generally be substituted for the raw data from which they are developed.

5. By adding items or expanding coverage, existing data sets can be augmented in specific useful ways. In particular:

a) The Current Population Survey and other major national sources of statistics on household structure should be augmented to include items specifically identifying several increasingly common or important household forms and family relationships, especially families with foster children, or with adopted children, and blended families, in which there are step- and half-relationships.

b) The fertility supplement to the Current Population Survey should include unmarried younger teenagers among the populations eligible for the supplement.

c) The child care supplement should be extended to gather data on the child care arrangements made for school-age children, and children of single-parent fathers.

d) Children aged 14 and 15 should again be included among the population covered by employment questions on the Current Population Survey.

e) The Survey of Income and Program Participation should be recognized as a social science resource whose scope is broader than the current economic focus. Consequently, it should be designed to gather basic descriptive information on children, their families, and households.

6. A review of the timing of Current Population Survey supplements should be conducted to assess the effects of timing on the quality and usefulness of the data. In particular, the

use of the June supplement to collect child care data should be examined in light of the impact of school schedules on the care of children.

7. Data should be gathered from the person who can most reliably and accurately provide the information desired. For attitudes, most personal characteristics, and many behaviors, this person is the subject himself or herself. Thus, for many topics (such as income, education, or employment) this may mean that each household member (other than young children) should be separately interviewed. Children as young as 9 are reliable respondents on most topics relating to personal characteristics.

8. There is a need for additional information on the development of school-aged children. To provide such data, a general purpose national survey of school-aged children should be established making possible the development of a comprehensive picture of the characteristics of these children, of their family and social environments, and of the use of program services by children and their families.

9. Consideration should be given to the use of retiring panels from the Current Population Survey and the Survey of Income and Program Participation for follow-up surveys that would take advantage of the longitudinal nature of the design of these surveys.

10. A survey of the children of the respondents in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth should be conducted that would examine the characteristics and conditions of these children in light of the rich background data available on their parents.

ISSUE GROUP ON FAMILIES,

SCHOOLS, AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Panel Members	Federal Agency Resource Persons
Doris Entwisle, Moderator	Alan Ginsburg
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Marshall Smith	
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FAMILIES, SCHOOLS, AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The issue group on Families, Schools, and Educational Outcomes prepared a set of recommendations for action that are listed below in order of priority.

1. A National Longitudinal Survey of Children in grades Kindergarten through 8 should be initiated. The survey should rely on the child as the main respondent. This should be a cohort-sequential study lasting at least 20 years, with new cohorts added every 3 years. The data should include information on classrooms and schools as well as on the students.

2. A set of core indicators for education should be developed that are derived from a strong theoretical base. Such indicators might include behavioral measures representing relatively low-level competencies or performance on small tasks, indicators of the learning environment, and of the quality of teachers. The group recommends that this effort be supported with private resources and be undertaken by a new commission on education under the aegis of an organization such as the National Academy of Sciences.

3. A Question Bank should be developed to select and make available questions or items previously field tested and found to be psychometrically sturdy. Demographic questions as well as items derived from extant tests or scales should be included. Private

support should be found for such an undertaking. The purpose of the recommendation is to permit findings from several small-scale studies to be aggregated into meta-analyses or to be interpreted in light of nationally representative samples.

4. A biennial or triennial report on "Education for the Poor" should be prepared that would emphasize data collection in sites known to present special difficulties. A number of concerns require careful consideration in developing such a report, including the following:

a) developing tests for use in inner cities;

b) differentiating among drop-outs, chronic absentees, and truants;

c) addressing language problems introduced by variations in dialect.

5. Resources should be devoted to methodological as well as substantive issues, especially basic statistical research on meta-analysis methodology and on testing and weighting. This recommendation grew out of recommendation #3, above, but is intended as a freestanding recommendation and should proceed independently of #3.

6. The oversight role of the Office of Management and Budget regarding statistical information provided by federal agencies needs to be reviewed, though the mechanisms to do this are not obvious. Perhaps a working relationship could be developed between the

Committee on National Statistics within the National Academy of Sciences and Congressional committees charged with oversight of the relevant activities in the Executive Branch.

7. A number of current or projected government efforts need strong encouragement and assured continuance. Specifically:

a) The U.S. should participate aggressively in the International Education Association research effort.

b) The proposed new cohort should be added to the High School and Beyond survey.

c) The survey of college freshmen should be continued until respondents are 32-33 years old.

d) The young adult part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress should be reinstated.

8. Survey data should conform as much as possible to an event history format because: 1) most developmental rates change over time; and 2) collapsing event history data provides data in most other commonly-used formats but the reverse is not true.

9. Government agencies should cooperate in the design of new surveys, and studies of different topics should be piggy-backed on the same survey instrument whenever possible.

10. A yearly (or biennial) catalogue like the one furnished conference participants should be prepared describing those federal data systems that collect information relevant to children and their families.

ISSUE GROUP ON HEALTH-RELATED

BEHAVIORS IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Panel Members	Federal Agency Resource Persons
Jerald Bachman, Moderator	Duane Alexander
Kristin Moore, Rapporteur	Michael Fishman
Robert Haggerty	Gerry Hendershot
Denise Kandel	Coryl Jones
Sheppard Kellam	Mary Grace Kovar
Nicholas Zill	William Pratt

1. Group members placed a significant value on the regular and predictable collection of data on topics such as children's health, sexual activity, contraceptive use and childbearing, use of drugs, nutrition and dietary habits, and use of medical services. Data collecton efforts that currently obtain such information should be maintained in terms of sample size, periodicity, data quality and timeliness of data. Proposed funding cuts affecting the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) and other agencies seriously jeopardize these efforts and should be reversed.

2. The group also noted the importance of having information on several such outcomes in the same survey, and including a full range of antecedent variables in such a survey.

3. The addition of items to existing data collection programs is recommended as a very cost-effective way to extend the range of useful information. Specifically, the addition of health-related items in school-based studies is an addition that would be fruitful.

4. A national panel study of children and youth, focusing on the development of a range of health-related behaviors and attitudes, is desirable. To explore the feasibility of such a study, a working

group should be established that includes government and academic members with expertise in a variety of relevant disciplines. Support for such a study should be sought from a variety of public and private sources.

5. The practice of not questioning a young person directly regarding his or her behavior should be reconsidered. The integrated household sample surveys, for example the National Health Interview Survey and other data collection programs of NCHS, should interview directly those young people age 12 and older, and perhaps those even younger, regarding health-related behaviors. Age-appropriate interview methods should be developed to make this possible.

6. Agencies that let contracts or grants for data collection activities should require, as a deliverable, a clean public use tape and documentation within a specific (and short) period of time.

7. Detailed information on birth date should be collected and provided on public use tapes.

8. An ongoing inter-agency working group should be established to:

a) develop modules of background items to be collected;

b) develop a set of data publication categories for background items such as age, family structure and income; and

c) coordinate measurement of outcome variables as much as possible.

9. Whenever possible, tabulated data should be presented simultaneously by age and sex of the child, as well as by other background items as appropriate.

10. Agencies should cooperate in funding and coordinating methodological studies of sensitive issues, such as drug use, teenage sexuality, and abortion.

11. For topics where this would be fruitful, specific requests for proposals should be used as a mechanism to encourage the analysis of extant data and to encourage literature reviews.

12. Methodological devices such as follow-back surveys and network sampling should be explored as low-cost ways to broaden data coverage and timeliness.

13. Private sector funding sources should be encouraged to support consultant services to supplement the design and analysis efforts of federal data programs that have been weakened by budget cuts.

ISSUE GROUP ON

CHILDREN AS VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS

Panel Members	Federal Agency Resource Persons
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In terms of the scope of the issues and number and types of national statistical series or special studies to consider, this panel faced a large task. Twenty-three national data collection efforts sponsored singly or jointly by sixteen separate Federal agencies or bureaus and private foundations directly address some aspect of children as victims and offenders. These include:

-- annual or periodic voluntary administrative statistical series such as the FBI Uniform Crime Reports, the National Analysis of Official Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting, Vital Statistics on Mortality;

-- victimization studies, such as the National Crime Survey, the Safe School Study, the National Survey of Children;

-- self-report surveys of offending, such as the National Youth Survey, and Monitoring the Future; and

-- special purpose surveys of institutions and programs, such as the National Study of Children's Residential Institutions and Alternative Programs, Children in Custody, the Survey of Inmates of Local Jails, and the Decennial Census of the Population - Persons in Institutions and Group Quarters.

Despite the large number of sources providing relevant data, information on children as offenders and victims is fragmented,

and the data systems relating to children as victims and offenders are fairly primitive. The major institutional arrangements necessary for building a reliable data base are lacking and need to be developed. There is generally a need for a more coherent and rational approach to gathering and analyzing data on this issue.

Given the time limits of the conference, the panel members agreed to focus on data required to measure the accountability of the juvenile/criminal justice system. This requires estimates of potential clientele; number and type of clients at each stage of processing; and resource allocation to jurisdictions and to functions. Since there were too many specific information needs and data sets to be discussed individually, the panel addressed major organizational and institutional changes that will improve statistics related to juvenile crime and victimization of youth. These recommendations follow.

1. A major sample survey should be fielded to identify potential clients of the juvenile justice system including both victims and offenders.

This survey should cast a broad net so as to include a wide variety of problems and behaviors, not simply those narrowly defined as crime, and should be a cooperative effort involving several agencies interested in juvenile problems. The specific

form of such a survey vehicle cannot be defined here -- that is, whether an independent household survey, a supplement to an ongoing survey, a school-based survey, etc. However, two specific steps that should be taken immediately can be recommended:

a) The National Youth Survey, conducted by the Behavioral Research Institute in Boulder, Colorado, should be continued in order to measure the level of juvenile misbehavior that could be addressed by the juvenile justice system; and

b) the National Crime Survey data on juvenile victims should be improved, as suggested by the National Crime Survey Redesign Project, and supplemented periodically.

2. Efforts should be made to improve or supplement administrative series that report the number and type of juveniles at each stage of processing. This involves several interrelated activities:

a) In order to provide basic accountability information, the participation of jurisdictions in major administrative series must be improved. Incentives should be offered to increase participation in the major administrative series. These incentives could include providing participating jurisdictions with useful data or financial incentives in a sample-based system similar to that used in the National Electronic Information and Surveillance System.

b) More immediately, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention should become involved in the ongoing

redesign of the Uniform Crime Reports to ensure that sufficient attention is given to issues affecting juveniles.

c) Efforts should be made to standardize definitions, reporting units, units of analysis and other aspects of major administrative series. For example:

i) the definition of juveniles in terms of age should be standardized;

ii) the definition of status offenses such as Persons in Need of Supervision or Minors in Need of Supervision, arrest or adjustments, etc., should be standardized;

iii) systems should be able to take both the child and the case as the unit of analysis, not just the event (victimizations, offenses);

iv) unique identifiers should be developed so that cases and persons can be linked or matched across organizations while taking privacy issues into careful consideration.

d) The confidentiality restrictions of the Bureau of the Census limit the usefulness of data collected by that agency from juvenile justice organizations. Agencies should ask for a reassessment of the Bureau's disclosure rules or negotiate ways of preserving confidentiality while allowing maximum use of the data.

e) Steps should be taken to expedite the review and release of reports produced from major surveys and administrative series. Timely release will encourage both participation in data collection and use of the resulting data.

f) Particular attention should be given to the area of juvenile court statistics because there are no comprehensive or representative national data describing court processing of juveniles. Nor are there any national data on juvenile probation and parole.

g) Finally, existing, high quality administrative data series such as the Children in Custody data should be supported. The concept of identifying and enumerating children in custody should be expanded to include juveniles in all forms of adult institutional custody (corrections, jails and lock-ups). Further consideration should be given to conducting a national sample survey of youth in public and private facilities to determine the patterns of youthful behavior and their health, educational and developmental needs.

3. Providing accountability information on juveniles and the juvenile justice system should be approached by making use of a three-tiered system. The first tier should provide basic information for accountability purposes, that is:

a) the number and type of potential clients,

b) number and type of clients at each stage of processing, and

c) resource allocation to jurisdictions and to functions. A second tier of periodic supplements or ancillary data collection efforts should be used to investigate more fully the general problems and issues identified using information from the first system.

A third tier using more focused, in-depth studies would address specific policy problems in the detail required to determine effectiveness and to understand the processes involved.

The Children in Custody series exemplifies the first tier of this approach. This series provides basic information on the number of youth in juvenile detention and correctional facilities nationwide. Because of the limitations inherent in using a facility-based sample and a mailed questionnaire, little information can be provided about the individuals in this population in terms of their previous experiences as offenders or victims, their family situations, foster care or other institutional placement histories. However, this information could be gathered through personal interviews with a nationally representative sample of juveniles in residence, a sample derived from the universe of facilities surveyed in the first tier, the Children in Custody census. This second tier of data collection could provide a rich, and heretofore nonexistent, source of child-specific data that would provide information on

basic system accountability issues such as the relationship of length of stay to the seriousness of the offense. Although this second tier survey would provide information on who is where for what reasons, this type of data would not contain program effectiveness measures such as recidivism. The third tier would consist of intensive program evaluations that analyze both the program context and the performance of juveniles released from those programs to yield national estimates of recidivism and other effectiveness measures.

Together these three tiers would provide an integrated approach in which the first tier would be designed to guide the sampling and data collection in the next tier and each subsequent phase would build on the data collected in the previous tier. The advantage of this conceptual scheme over the current, fragmented approach is that not only would it provide comprehensive reliable information on juvenile corrections nationwide, but also the data collection instruments and procedures developed could be instituted at the local or institutional level to improve information and data collection systems for both program development and policy-making purposes.

4. The development of a coherent strategy for improving and maximizing the utility of existing national statistical data collection efforts related to children as victims and offenders requires a concentrated effort among funding agencies, researchers, and the Office of Management and Budget. In order

to carry out the preliminary recommendations discussed above, several interagency and interdisciplinary planning groups should be established to: carefully review data sets relevant to particular issues and populations; and determine the most appropriate strategies for initiating short-term and long-term improvements in these data collection efforts.

5. The Federal agency with the primary legislative responsibility for a particular issue should initiate the process and assume responsibility for promoting the necessary reforms. Existing interagency planning teams, such as the joint working group of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration, should be utilized to focus on specific areas of mutual interest. The Federal Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention should pursue data collecton improvement as one of its program areas.

6. The three-tiered information system described above requires the cooperation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Institute of Justice, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

a) Those agencies with major ongoing statistical series (first tier) should be willing to use these series as vehicles for supplements that would provide more in-depth information (second and third tier) on specific problems or for specific subsets of the populations covered.

b) Those agencies that fund special studies should encourage the use of supplements to major statistical series whenever possible.

c) Price schedules should be developed whereby agencies funding supplements would be charged per unit costs lower than those of the private sector, yet sufficient to absorb some of the fixed costs of fielding the statistical series.

7. The Office of Management and Budget should take more active and positive steps to foster cooperation among major statistical agencies as opposed to merely reviewing burden budgets.

8. Child Trends should facilitate the process through convening meetings of researchers, statisticians, state and local policy makers to inform Federal decisions. Child Trends should also continue to play a role in educating key congressional committees that deal with issues related to children as victims and offenders. A useful contribution would be to supplement the conference workbook with summaries of relevant data sets not covered in the advance materials. Dissemination of the workbook and panel recommendations to a broad audience is also recommended.

ISSUE GROUP ON

SPECIAL POPULATIONS OF CHILDREN

Panel Members	Federal Agency Resource Persons
John Butler, Moderator	Robert Barnes
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SPECIAL POPULATIONS OF CHILDREN

The group identified four categories of children and youth that could be considered members of special populations. These categories are not mutually exclusive; overlap among categories is increasingly the rule. The four categories identified were:

The sociodemographically different. This group includes socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic and racial minorities -- not only large minorities that may be adequately represented in existing research programs, but also numerous groups that are too small to be adequately represented without controlled sampling. Examples of this group include: children living in poverty or outside their biological family; Amish or immigrant children; Hispanic or Hmong children; black or Asian-American children.

Medically, developmentally, physically or behaviorally different or at risk. This group includes children who are generally recognized as handicapped or at risk of being so defined, and who have generally high probabilities of needing special services in school or the community because of their disabilities. Examples of this group are chronically ill children, developmentally disabled (e.g., moderately to profoundly retarded, cerebral palsied children), physically handicapped (e.g., spina bifida children), runaway or throwaway children, and children of low birth weight.

Children receiving special services. These are the children for whom society allocates resources and/or provides services at a level significantly above that of the majority of children in the society. Examples of this group include children with exceptionally poor academic skills who receive remedial, compensatory, or special education services; habitual truants who receive counseling; delinquent children under custody or supervision; children in foster care placements; or children in families receiving AFDC payments.

Groups of potential but unconfirmed special population status. This group includes children and youth about whom there is reason to hypothesize a special population status, but about whom insufficient information exists to substantiate that status. Examples include children at risk because of various pre- and perinatal conditions on the part of their mother, children from areas of poor air or water quality, highly transient children, children in areas of very high unemployment, or children in broken families with delinquent child care payments.

The work group was sensitive to the wide range of children that might be considered members of special populations. The backgrounds and interests of the groups led them to concentrate on the second and third subpopulations, but there was consensus that all four were extremely important. There was also a sense that there is a special need to improve statistics on children in subpopulations 2 and 3 who are also members of subpopulations 1 and 4. Group members would, therefore, encourage additional and broadened exploration of existing and needed research on specific special subpopulations by a wider range of appropriate knowledgeable and concerned persons.

In addition, work group members noted that the major national surveys produce statistics of relatively little value for most policy, program and general informational needs of agencies and individuals concerned with special populations of children. Although these special populations are diverse, they do have several commonalities: their minority status in the larger society; their generally low coverage in existing national surveys; and their relatively high dependence on government to insure adequate opportunities for development, health and social well-being. As a consequence of these considerations, the recommendations deriving from the work group tend to be general in scope with few detailed suggestions for modifications to existing national studies.

1. Research on special populations should maximize the use of the child as the unit of analysis. While developing aggregate statistics on a group with widely differing members may satisfy general impressions of having learned something about a subpopulation, a number of problems are associated with their method. First, aggregate statistics often obscure more than they clarify. For example, the level of services needed by a mildly retarded person is generally far nearer to that needed by a typical "normal" person than the level needed by a profoundly retarded person, a distinction that tends to be lost when all retarded persons are grouped together. It is often necessary to regroup sample members according to functional level. Second, aggregate data do not permit multiple problem subjects, who are common among special populations, to be identified, described and studied in relation to the services they

need or receive. Finally, using the individual as the unit of analysis is the only method that effectively permits a posteriori hypothesis testing or the use of data by a wide variety of groups not directly involved in the original analyses. The need for data with this level of flexibility is particularly important for research on relative risks within the highly divergent special populations.

2. Extensive data collection is needed on the range of services utilized by members of special populations. These data should have the flexibility to relate service usage to a range of demographic, functional, familial, and economic characteristics as well as to service availability and need. Such data are critical to assigning service targets for special subpopulations of children. The Survey of Income and Program Participation will provide an excellent possibility for gathering such data. However, to meet their full potential these data must provide a comprehensive description of the many characteristics of individuals that affect their levels and types of program participation.

3. Increased coverage of special populations is needed within studies relevant to long-term risk, attainment, and expenditures. Work group members were particularly struck by the lack of adequate coverage and analysis of the handicapped or Title I students in the Natonal Center for Educational Statistics' follow-up studies of students moving into adulthood. This omission overlooks those students who have had the most costly educations and presumably those for whom future service costs will be most directly related to

educational achievement. However, learning how well schools are preparing the handicapped, the disadvantaged, and others at the margins for adult life would be just one benefit. Since schools are the one experience virtually all children share, it is particularly important that attempts to identify the long-term service needs of our most vulnerable students begin in the school years. Ideally such research would begin before the sophomore year (the age group included in the initial sample in the High School and Beyond Study). What is more important, however, is to include in this research those individuals of sophomore age who have a higher probability of permanent or recurring dependency in adulthood; who have high service consumption. Considerable information about the extent and effectiveness of service provision can be gained through study of these special populations.

4. In a related discussion, work group members considered the exclusion of handicapped children to be a significant weakness of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Data on the functional and academic skills of handicapped students is not only by law the responsibility of our schools, it is an expensive responsibility that deserves monitoring.

5. Cluster samples and supplements to existing surveys focusing on specific subpopulations should be implemented periodically to increase knowledge about those subgroups. Such procedures would be highly appropriate for the Current Population Surveys, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, the National Health Interview Survey, and other recurring studies.

6. Since most programs for special populations are state run -- that is, the program and policy decisions that determine eligibility are vested primarily in the states -- maximally useful data will often be gathered by surveys structured around the state as a significant independent variable. At times this approach might mean conducting surveys in which subjects are selected within only a sample of states, as opposed to a national probability sample. With major recurring surveys, it suggests the use of supplementary surveys in specified states or special analyses of individual states.

7. Data on institutional populations and on individual children within institutions need to be collected on a recurring basis. Work group members agreed that surveys collecting data on institutionalized populations directly from institutions should be conducted periodically. However, it was also felt to be particularly important that nationally representative probability samples of children in institutions be selected and carefully studied from time to time. It is important not only to know how many children and youth are institutionalized, but also their characteristics; backgrounds; service needs; the nature of their habilitative and rehabilitative programs; costs of care, etc.; and how these change over time. Work group members also felt a need to expand the information available on children in non-institutional out-of-home placements (especially foster homes).

8. In addition to large scale surveys, increased use should be made of methods based on surveillance, monitoring, and ethnographic

research. Work group members thought it important to note that some intensive studies of relatively few cases or service settings have been as productive as large-scale national surveys in understanding and improving the status of special populations of children. It was also suggested that interest should be increased in special supplements to surveys that attempt to develop qualitative meanings for the survey questions.

9. Numerous agencies are consumers of national statistics on special populations. Therefore it is important that those statistics are gathered that can be used by as many interested agencies as possible. In some cases, this will require including a number of questions in order to delineate characteristics that result in the special population designation. For example, different questions about functional limitations and specific diagnoses may be required to make data usable by two agencies with overlapping target populations. To best satisfy the needs of multiple consumers of the data, research planners should ask government agencies for operational definitions of their target populations and for specific survey items that would be necessary to make the generic survey useful to them. In turn, it would be the agencies' responsibility to seek the expertise needed to develop these definitions.

10. Better information is needed on the families of children who fall into a special population category. Data are lacking on the characteristics and needs of such families, on the costs and demands involved in raising certain populations of children, and on the

services and benefits available and derived from family-oriented programs (e.g., family subsidies for maintaining severely handicapped children in their natural or adoptive homes).

11. Work group members felt there needs to be a clearinghouse that can be used by people who need access to available national statistics on children and families. An organization fulfilling this function could also suggest modifications to improve the quality and/or coverage of those statistics. To do so, it must have links among government data collection agencies, government and private data users, and private (publicly or privately funded) research projects related to children and youth.

12. A detailed review of existing national survey protocols should be conducted by work groups comprised of persons with specific knowledge about and interest in varied subgroups within the special populations. This group should be charged with:

a) making concrete suggestions about specific changes in instrumentation that would collect useful data without changing the methodology of existing (or projected) surveys;

b) making concrete suggestions about methodological changes that would increase the usefulness of existing (or projected) studies (e.g., supplementary schedules, disproportionate sampling, broadening the sampling universe); and

c) outlining new, significantly modified, or augmented surveys that would provide important information on one or more subgroups within special populations of children.

For example, specific data on children living outside their natural homes are greatly needed. To a limited extent, group members thought it would be possible to gather such data with the decennial census or the Current Population Survey, if specific questions about the status of nonbiological children living in families were included. A special supplement focusing on these children could provide information on both children and foster families. A more detailed interview study with longitudinal components could then be based on a sample of homes with nonbiological members.

13. Above all, work group members urged careful examination of existing national data collection efforts with regard to the ways their scope could be broadened to include useful data on special populations. The group felt much more could be accomplished with relatively modest changes.

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